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MN013701S. Navy Surgeon General: "We Will Pass This Test"

Tuesday's terrorist attack was a brutal assault meant to instill fear in all Americans and test the resolve of this country. Make no mistake, we will pass this test.

Our government is steadfastly committed to finding these terrorists and those who harbor them. As President Bush commented, "This is going to take the long-term commitment of everyone in our military services and of all Americans. This is not going to be a short program."

Even as we enter what has been described by our leaders as "the first war of the 21st Century," the United States government is functioning, as is the Navy and Navy Medicine. We are working around the clock to support the search and rescue efforts both in New York and here in Washington, DC. USNS Comfort completed its on-load of personnel and medical supplies, and has been performing her mission to provide assistance and support to our fallen comrades and those who are conducting search and recovery efforts from her pier-side berth on Manhattan Island, New York since Friday night, 14 September 01. Our Navy SPRINT Team continues to provide support to the Navy Annex, Pentagon, Navy Yard, and others, and Navy Medicine is involved in decedent affairs at Dover Air Force Base.

As the Chief of Naval Operations recently said, "This conflict puts everyone of us on the front lines at all times, at home and overseas. Whether at sea or ashore, in the fleet or supporting the fleet, we must understand and be ready for the enemy that confronts us."

Many in Navy Medicine are asking me what they should do, how they can help. My answer is a reference to the CNO's remarks... "Stay sharp. Be ready." This means check your gear; make sure that your "ammo is dry" - whatever your "ammo" is, as an integral part of what you do in support of the Navy Medicine mission. Make sure your sea bag is ready, that your readiness status is complete ... and that you are focused on your Navy Medicine job that directly or indirectly supports our mission.

You may not be deployed. You may stay where you are to support the readiness effort. But wherever you are, whatever your job, you must do all you can to be ready and stay ready.

We are in for some difficult times ahead. We are at a critical juncture. We will be called upon to fulfill our duty of defending the republic from those who wish us harm. Let us ensure that our actions add to the Medicine's unbroken legacy of service. Take care of your patients. Take care of yourselves. And take care of each other!

-VADM Michael L. Cowan, MC, Surgeon General of the Navy
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MN013702S. Bringing Comfort to New York in Time of Need

By JO2 Ellen Maurer, USNS Comfort

ABOARD USNS COMFORT IN NEW YORK CITY - What started out as a mission to save lives ended up being a call to care for and comfort a city in need.

At 3 p.m. on Sept. 12, USNS Comfort left its berth in Baltimore with about 150 Sailors from the National Naval Medical Center Bethesda, Md., and other East Coast medical treatment facilities, along with about 61 civil service mariners, headed for New York. At the time, its mission was to provide medical assistance to the victims of the Sept. 11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center.

By the time the ship reached Naval Weapons Station Earle, N.J. on Friday and loaded about 500 more Sailors, the Comfort received orders to change missions. It would provide logistical and support services to fire fighters and emergency personnel working in the disaster recovery effort.

"Things are changing so rapidly in this operation," explained Comfort's Military Treatment Facility Commanding Officer CAPT Charles Blankenship, MC, to the crew as he told them about the change in missions. "We just have to be prepared and realize that what we do today, may not be what we are doing tomorrow."

For many of the NNMCC Sailors, the change in missions meant turning around and heading back home. In a little more than an hour, nearly 450 medical and support personnel had re-packed, disembarked and boarded buses, destined to return to their normal duty stations. The nearly 150 critical core personnel who remained on board were left with the task of converting the hospital ship from a major medical and surgical facility to a logistics support facility ready to care for possibly thousands of disaster relief workers.

For the crew still on board USNS Comfort, the past week has been a lesson in readiness, flexibility and dedication. Everyday, hundreds of police officers, firemen, and government workers pass through the ship's quarterdeck, looking for a hot shower, a real meal and a place to sleep.

"The people on this ship are amazing," said New York City Police Officer Kevin O'Keefe, who came onboard the ship with some other police officers to get a hot breakfast and some coffee. "When we first came on board someone escorted us to the galley. It was like they rolled the red carpet out for us. As cops, we don't get treated like this unless it is Thanksgiving or Christmas, and we are at home."

"We want to say thank you to everyone on the ship and in the military," he said.

The casualty receiving area on board the ship that would normally be used to give initial medical care to patients has been converted to a check-in location for relief workers. The hospital beds are now covered with snacks, drinks and other donated supplies for the relief workers checking aboard. Lining the walls are t-shirts, donated from all over the country, with handwritten messages of thanks to the workers for their efforts.

There are cards, too. One written by a child reads, "Dear Firemen, Thank you for trying to find people. If you can, can you please find my aunt? Her name is Donna Clarke. Thank-you, Kristina Clarke"

LCDR Steve Gottlieb, MSC, director of administration on the Comfort and deputy head of the patient administration service line at NNMCC, admitted that he couldn't help but read that particular card several times a day.

"I'm drawn to it," said Gottlieb. "Here is this little girl, begging for someone to find her aunt. It's the purity in her simple words; her love for her family member ... it's heartbreaking."

Although most of USNS Comfort crew has not been permitted to leave the

pier, some small groups have been down to the center of the disaster site. CDR Ralph Jones, MC, director of surgical services on USNS Comfort and an NNMCM surgical oncologist, led an advance group of five crewmembers down to what most are referring to as "Ground Zero." Jones said the scene is unimaginable.

"There's paper everywhere; all kinds of disruption," said Jones. "People are sleeping on debris. Rescue workers standing up, leaning against street posts trying to get some shut-eye...When we got there, people started clapping, telling us 'thanks' for coming.

"Then, all of a sudden, I had about 40 or 50 firefighters gathered around me, crying. They needed help, a break, but they were afraid that if they left the scene, they wouldn't be able to come back."

Jones realized then just how important the new mission was for Comfort and its crew. The ship provides a place for them to get away for a few hours; the Sailors provide smiles to lift their morale and ears to listen to their stories.

Some of the corpsmen aboard feel disappointed that they won't be able to lend more medical assistance, but most realize the value of their current role.

ENS Marge Faulkner, MSC, who is a dietician at NNMCM and a supply officer aboard the Comfort, said, "Doctors are now doing things they normally don't do. Nurses are out there meeting and greeting. Everyone is just trying to help out in whatever way they can."

Teamwork has been a major part of accomplishing the mission. When a steam line broke that temporarily left the ship without hot water for several hours, the civilian mariners worked quickly to make repairs so that rescue workers would get that hot shower they came for.

When a crane, normally used to bring supplies aboard, broke, Sailors formed a human chain that went from the pier all the way to the stock rooms, passing boxes, one by one, for hours to load all the shipments.

SH3 Oleg Gutkin from NNMCM, who usually works in the hospital's warehouse, said he could see his hometown of Brooklyn from the deck of the ship as it pulled into port. He admitted that the entire crew seems tired, but they know they're making a difference, and that keeps them going.

"The relief workers really appreciate what we're doing for them here," said Gutkin. "They talk to us and tell us how much we're helping ... We can tell that just by looking at the expressions on their faces when they're here. They know we care."

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MN013703S. Navy Medicine On Front Line of Terrorist Response

By Jan Davis, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery

They packed their seabags, almost 750 officers and enlisted in all, answering the 9-1-1 call of a nation horrified by the actions of an enemy without a country, turning American technology against it in a terrorist attack that previously only writers of fiction could imagine.

Doctors, dentists, nurses, medical specialists, hospital corpsmen, dental technicians - most from National Naval Medical Center Bethesda, but some also came from Naval Hospitals Groton, Naval Medical Clinics Newport, Quantico, Pax River, and Annapolis; Naval Medical Center Portsmouth; and National Naval Dental Center Bethesda, all of them heading for USNS Comfort to treat the injured in the Sept. 11 attack at the World Trade Center.

More than 80 of them from NMC Portsmouth boarded USS BATAAN (LHD 5) at Morehead City, NC, to augment the medical staff of ships and units that sortied out of Norfolk, VA.

The remainder arrived by buses at Naval Weapons Station Earle, N.J. to join USNS Comfort, only to turn around and go home. For now, their healing

skills would be best used at their own medical treatment facilities, joining the thousands in Navy Medicine throughout the world who are getting ready to answer when the call comes.

USNS Comfort, however, continued on to Manhattan to be a safe harbor for the thousands of rescue and recovery workers.

And in the aftermath of the world's worst terrorist attack, heroes of Navy Medicine are emerging, men and women including:

- CAPT John P. Feerick, MC, and CAPT Stephen S. Frost, MC, both assigned to the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, were at a meeting at the Pentagon when the terrorists attacked. Within minutes, they located the impact area and began assisting 12 patients suffering from burns and other trauma injuries even before emergency services and fire crews arrived. With limited medical assets, they were able to stabilize their patients and make arrangements for them to be moved to protect them from the threat of other attacks. The two stayed through the night and into the next morning.

- LCDR Dave Tarantino, MC, who heard cries for help from the inferno of the attack on the Pentagon, and crawled through a 1-by-2 foot hole to help Jerry Henson, a civilian Navy employee who was injured and pinned under a heavy burning desk. Tarantino freed him and helped him escape. Tarantino is assigned to the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense.

- CAPT Jane Viera, CHC, the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery's chaplain, ran to provide spiritual help at the Pentagon after the tragedy, offering last rites to the dead and dying.

- HMC Warren Terrell, was at a meeting in the Navy Annex up the hill from the Pentagon when alarms went off to evacuate the building. Told a triage area was being set up at the Marine's Henderson Hall Gymnasium, he and two other hospital corpsmen commandeered medical supplies from the Navy Annex Clinic and prepared to take casualties. Throughout the day, they cared for burn and smoke inhalation victims.

- LT Kathleen Maas, NC, was working at the DiLorenzo Clinic at the Pentagon when the plane hit. She ran with her patient from the building when she heard frantic shouts. By the time she reached the Pentagon lawn there were already patients for her to see - older patients who were having trouble breathing or who had fallen and received head wounds. Within minutes, she was caring for patients injured by falling debris, burned in the fire, and suffering from smoke inhalation. She escorted a patient to Walter Reed Army Medical Clinic and then returned to the Pentagon to again help.

- HMC Debra Zimmerman, who, upon being evacuated from the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, volunteered with the Red Cross as liaison officer at the Pentagon, ensuring local and national agencies got the support they needed to continue relief operations.

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